United Nations A/C.5/61/SR.13

General Assembly
Sixty-first session

Official Records

Distr.: General
27 November 2006

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 13th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 31 October 2006, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Yousfi ..... (Algeria)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Saha

Contents

Agenda item 117: Programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (*continued*)

Renovation to the residence of the Secretary-General: revised estimates to the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

06-59372 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 117: Programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (*continued*)

Renovation to the residence of the Secretary-General: revised estimates to the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (A/61/377 and A/61/523)

1. **Ms. Nowlan** (Programme Planning and Budget Division, Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts) said that, as indicated in paragraphs 4 to 10 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/377), the Secretary-General's residence was in need of major renovation. Paragraphs 11 to 13 explained that the ageing of the building and the obsolescence of its mechanical, plumbing, heating and cooling systems had given rise to a situation in which regular maintenance and emergency repairs were no longer sufficient. The proposed renovation would include the replacement of critical equipment systems, the refurbishment of public areas used to entertain high-level dignitaries and Heads of State and the upgrading of security installations. The completion of the current Secretary-General's tenure provided an opportunity to begin the project, which was scheduled for implementation over a period of nine months, with construction ending in September 2007. The General Assembly was invited to approve the renovation, to authorize the Secretary-General to enter into commitments of up to $4,490,400 under sections 1 and 32 of the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 and to request the Secretary-General to report on the expenditure in the context of the second performance report for 2006-2007.

2. **Mr. Saha** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/61/523), said that, in keeping with proper budget procedure, the proposal to renovate the Secretary-General's residence should have been submitted as part of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 rather than as a revised estimate in the middle of the biennium.

3. The renovation should be carried out in strict compliance with established procedures, including open bidding. To avoid cost escalation, the time schedule for the works should be adhered to. Every effort should be made to successfully conclude negotiations with the Sutton Place Association in order to ensure that all necessary security improvements could be made. The Advisory Committee recommended that the Secretary-General should be authorized to enter into commitments up to the maximum amount proposed, but trusted that the sums concerned would be absorbed within the approved appropriations under sections 1 and 32 of the programme budget for the current biennium.

4. **Ms. Pehrman** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Croatia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Norway and Ukraine, said that, while the European Union considered renovation of the Secretary-General's residence to be necessary, it shared the concerns of the Advisory Committee. It wondered what options and solutions had been explored and how the cost estimates had been calculated, and expected that steps would be taken to ensure transparency and accountability. All necessary security improvements, including upgrading to the minimum operating security standards, should be implemented.

5. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the renovation of the Secretary-General's residence should have been addressed sooner, to avoid cost escalation and to ensure that the Secretary-General and his family could be accommodated in a safe and comfortable environment. The Group supported the proposal for additional resources to finance the project. The Department of Safety and Security should explain why security gaps had not yet been addressed, and the Advisory Committee should clarify the reasoning behind paragraph 13 of its report (A/61/523), as the stipulation that additional resource requirements should be absorbed within existing appropriations should not delay alterations, improvements and maintenance which the General Assembly had already approved under section 32 of the programme budget for the current biennium. Such delays could cause further cost escalation in the future. The Group agreed with the Advisory Committee that the envisaged time schedule must be adhered to and that the project should be implemented in a transparent and accountable manner.

6. **Ms. Shah** (United States of America) said that the condition of the Secretary-General's residence, as described in the relevant reports, was a matter of concern. Her delegation assumed that the proposed renovations would correct the existing deficiencies and conform to current New York City codes. It agreed with the comments of the Advisory Committee regarding the timing of the request for funds, and wondered why the proposal had not been part of the proposed programme budget for the biennium, particularly in the light of the safety concerns expressed. It also agreed with the Advisory Committee that delays should be avoided and that the cost of the renovation should be met from within existing resources under sections 1 and 32 of the programme budget.

7. **Ms. Kuroda** (Japan) said that her delegation, while supporting the proposal to renovate the Secretary-General's residence, shared the Advisory Committee's view that the request for funds should have been included in the proposed programme budget for the current biennium. It wondered why the Secretariat had delayed the submission of such a request if the condition of the building had been known for so long. The time schedule for the works should be adhered to strictly in order to avoid unnecessary cost escalation, and the estimated requirements for the project should be fully absorbed within the existing appropriations under sections 1 and 32 of the programme budget. The Committee would review the matter in the context of the second performance report for the biennium.

8. **Mr. Saha** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), responding to the request for clarification of paragraph 13 of the Advisory Committee's report, said that the Advisory Committee had taken account of two factors. First, the Organization was in the first year of the biennial budget. Second, the Committee had requested and received information on expenditure under section 32 of the programme budget up to the end of September 2006. The Advisory Committee had based its conclusions on that information, which indicated that only 29 per cent of the appropriation under section 32 had been spent. If the Committee wished to be provided with further details of the expenditure situation, it could approach the Secretariat.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.